1: Powdermaker E-5 (1929-1930) 1933 OM10 New Ireland OM10
Lesu

LIFE IN LESU

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

THREE degrees south of the equator in the Western Pacific is the village of Lesu, on the east coast of New Ireland, part of the Bismarck Archipelago, a group of islands lying north-east of Australia. The New Irelanders are the tall, more or less well-built Melanesian type, with kinky black hair, brown skin, and somewhat negroid features, and are a hospitable, kindly, good-natured people. In the past the men wore no clothing at all and the women only a straw apron. To-day, however, because of white influence, every-one wears a loin-cloth, and the women sometimes wear blouses, but most of the time these are omitted.

In size, New Ireland is the second largest island of the Bismarck Archipelago, and is long and narrow in shape. Running through the centre is a low range of mountains, about 3,000 feet at their highest altitude. Along the coast, beginning at the northern end, runs a road for over a hundred miles, one of the few roads in the whole Territory of New Guinea. The road follows the coast in a winding fashion, uphill and downhill, and over it travel the natives, by foot, and occasionally by bicycle, from one village to another. Long stretches of road have on one side the dense bush with its thick undergrowth of tangled vines, its bright-coloured flowers, among them the familiar south-sea hibiscus, the tall coconut palms, the delicate bamboo trees, the nodding areca palms, and many other trees over which fly brightly plumed birds. On the other side lies a sea which is dazzlingly brilliant in the sunshine, its glare broken here

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and there by little islands in the distance. There is no sign of human habitation. Other parts of the road run through native villages, with the little low, thatch-roofed, bamboo-walled huts nestling under the tall palm trees. In front of a house is a man playing with his infant son. Out on a reef is a group of men standing in circular formation knee-deep in the sea, each with a fishing-net or spear, waiting for the appropriate moment to close in on the fish. Further on sits an old man in front of the men's house, weaving a fishing-net. In the open compound are a group of women sitting on the ground, scraping the taro for their evening meal. From the road the gardens are not visible, for they are several miles distant in the bush.

The road leaves the village to run again through an uninhabited part, where the only sound is the roar of the waves against a high precipice. Then it turns in and passes through the evenly planted coconut trees of a white man's plantation, whose orderliness stands out in contrast with the irregular and crowded coconut trees in the villages. So the road continues, linking distant villages in a friendly fashion, whereas before the advent of the white man the relationship between them was merely the hostilities of warfare.[1]

DAILY LIFE

In the villages the day begins with the rising sun, which is the timepiece for the natives.[2] From the home emerge, yawning, the husband, wife, female children, and very young

[1] The road was begun under the German administration and is now kept up by native labour.

[2] The sun rises and sets at approximately six o'clock, with a variation of only about twenty minutes throughout the year. Sunrise, sunset, and night are the main distinctions of time. Other times are indicated by pointing to the place in the sky where the sun would be then. Boys who have worked on the white man's plantation know noon as the time for the midday meal, but it does not figure in native life.